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THE WHY OF RURAL FREE DELIVERY.

BY GENERAL RUSH C. HAWKINS.

THE management of the United States Post-Office occupies a unique position among the postal departments of the world. In European countries that important branch of the public service is conducted along the lines of well-established business principles, commercial discretion enforcing reasonable economies, but never to the detriment of the duties to be performed, which in the larger and well-governed nations are executed efficiently and with sufficient exactness. In no instance is a discovered source of deficit permitted to continue. Among the first experiments in government telegraphing, there were small annual deficits; and in several countries during the first years there were shortages in the package, or what might be termed the express, department, but they were not allowed to continue. New methods were adopted which insured adequate compensation for the services performed—usually showing a considerable profit to the government,—one year in England as much as \$22,000,000—without impairing the efficiency of the service.

It remained for us in the conduct of our postal affairs, as well as in other business departments of Government, to set the example of intentionally doing public business at a loss to the Government: of managing in the interest of favored classes, and, in the majority of instances, for the purpose of promoting partisan aims of practical politicians and office-holders, who are seeking only perpetuation of place and power, and always at the expense of economical administration of public affairs.

In support of this system we have our unnational legislation upholding an unjust protective tariff for the benefit of favored classes; the yearly "Rivers and Harbors Bill," with its many unnecessary appropriations; the many expenditures for public build-

ings in unimportant places where they are not needed; the second-class mail-matter abuse, which entails a yearly loss of from seven to ten millions; and, over and above all others as to amount, we have the monstrous, gigantic and unprecedented series of pension frauds.

A few thoughtful and patriotic citizens having the better interests of their country at heart, who had observed and been compelled to acquiesce in political conditions they could not approve, had ventured to hope that the abuses mentioned would have satisfied the political spoilsmen and tax-devouring classes, and that there would be no further inflictions of the same order. But they knew not of the capacity of the well-fed spoilsman appetite to crave for more; and they were doomed to an unexpected disappointment, caused by the bringing forth of a new scheme such as could not have been invented and put into active operation in any other country than our own.

The older postal abuses which had long since crystallized into exact form—unconscionable overpayments to favored railroads, in many instances to the extent of four times the usual charges for like services performed in the ordinary course of commerce, and the carrying of many kinds of second-class matter at less than one-quarter of the actual cost to the Government—had been in practice so long that there would be considerable difficulty in tracing them backwards, through their extended course of malignant activity, to their origin, or to the exact time of their inauguration; but that is not the case with this later addition to our postal family of abuses. The time of its conception in the womb of practical politics was the last half of the year 1896; but it first went into active operation in 1897, the first year of the McKinley administration. There are reasons for a suspicion that the vicious political influence of the Middle West was the power that breathed the breath of life into the nostrils of this monstrous scheme. Soon as it had been decided to inaugurate this new branch of the Postal service, it became necessary to find an experienced and efficient agent for its organization and promotion; and, fortunately for the inventors, there was ready at hand and installed in appropriate office at Washington, a *facile princeps*, a graduate in the school of Middle West politics, who was master of all the accomplishments which might be expected to flow from such an education.

The official in question came into his office under the influence of the most successful political speculator connected with the administration that appointed him, and he afterwards became known, officially, as the First Assistant Postmaster-General. For the special work in hand he was ideal. If he had been made to the order of a committee of the most expert partisans, he could not have embodied more completely the necessary qualifications for the quantity and peculiar quality of success which would have best pleased his masters. He knew the party machine, its ambitions and needs, and the kind of lubricants necessary to keep its various parts in such working order as would make it equal to all emergencies, from capturing the vote of a city or State to purchasing a National Convention.

During the first week of March in the year 1898, a citizen interested in the reformation of corrupt practices connected with the administration of postal affairs, called upon the Postmaster-General for the purpose of presenting to his attention some facts relating to one of the most flagrant abuses connected with his Department. He was received, presented the dominant facts involved, and was then referred to the First Assistant Postmaster-General, to whose office he was shown. There he waited until the advent of that official, when the matter in question was submitted for consideration. The discussion in relation to it had not proceeded very far before a card was brought in, and soon afterwards two individuals were announced. They were received by the official with a marked degree of cordiality, and the three betook themselves to another part of the room. The visitors proved to be characters of more than ordinary interest. One was a member of Congress and the other a "Visiting Statesman," who in machine parlance is usually called "The Boss."

These two individuals were of the same political locality and party and were bent upon spoils; and their conversation of about an hour's duration brought to the surface a series of revelations from the innermost recesses of the kingdom of the Boss which were of absorbing interest to the silent listener, whose eyes and ears opened the wider at the recital of each proposition presented. The Boss was the chief spokesman. He had carefully mapped out a network of "Rural Free-Delivery Routes" for the Congressional District over which he presided; and was urgently fluent in pressing their adoption. He descanted fer-

vently upon the difficulty experienced in carrying, at the last election, certain important parts of the district for the Republican party. His State was one of the doubtful States, and had as often gone for the Democrats as for the Republicans; hence, the necessity of developing this newly discovered source of political power in the interest of *the* party.

During his plea in favor of immediate action he was urgently eloquent. He brought to the fore a startling proposal, which was new to the official, and it was propounded in about these words: "As soon as the requisite number of routes have been established to meet the demands of the people, we will need Government road-inspectors, to see that the highways used, which will have become Government post-roads, are kept in order for the passage of the mails. We ought to have at least from two to five in each Congressional District." In answer to this part of the argument, the official, in substance, said: "In time, that necessity will have to be provided for; but it is too early to bring it before the people at this time. This scheme of rural delivery is a new one, is now just entering upon the experimental stage and must not be overloaded. Members of Congress are beginning to see its importance, and are becoming interested in its progress, and we may have reasons for looking forward to the success of our experiment; but we must not call for too large expenditures at first. The people must be educated and aroused to the importance of having their rights acknowledged by the Government. This will come to be known as a measure of our party, and the odium of its failure would rest upon our shoulders. Therefore the importance of slow and sure work for the foundation."

The interview closed with the assurance that "the Department" was on the side of the discoverers of this new source of party wealth.

The official then announced his willingness to listen to the would-be reformer, who had journeyed two hundred and fifty miles for the purpose of laying certain facts before the Postal Department which made out a perfectly clear case of unauthorized misdirection of Government work, for the benefit of a certain favored few who had not even a shadow of a right to call upon the Government for the performance of a certain service purely incidental to their business occupations. The official, in an impatient manner, heard the statement through, admitted its truth,

did not deny that it described an abuse which was being carried on at the expense of the Government, and said that the people demanded it, and that the Department could not go back of the people's demand. He closed the interview by saying that the matter was one that long continuation had placed beyond Department control—in other words, the fraud was of sufficient age and magnitude to entitle it to a place upon the list of privileged abuses.

The following table shows the growth of "Rural Free Delivery" routes from 1897, its first year, to June 30th, 1904:

	Appropriations	Routes in Operation.
1897.....	\$40,000	44
1898.....	50,000	148
1899.....	150,000	391
1900.....	450,000	1,276
1901.....	1,750,000	4,301
1902.....	3,993,740	8,466
1903.....	8,054,400	15,119
1904.....	12,921,700	24,566

The fiscal year of 1897 was the first of the experiment. Forty-four routes were established and \$40,000 appropriated. The next two years were, also, to an extent, experimental. But in the year 1900, when success had been assured beyond doubt, 1,276 routes were nurtured into working order and \$450,000 appropriated. By that time Departmental machinery had attained to a condition of efficiency which promised great usefulness in the future.

The results of the Departmental machinery, aided by interested political workers outside, during the four fiscal years ending June 30th, 1904, prove that all the promise born of the previous four years' experience was to be satisfactorily realized. During the year 1904, the last of those four years, the scheme was worked up to the high-pressure point all along the line, so that it succeeded in grinding out of its mill a fraction less than twenty-six routes for each day in the year. And, for the whole eight years comprised in the initiatory and formative period, we have a fraction less than 3,071 for each year, and about eight and a half for each day of the whole period.

The Postmaster-General, in his report for the fiscal year ending June 30th, 1904, gives a summary of the most important facts which go to make up the year's history of rural free delivery. The all-important items for the consideration of the tax-producer are contained in the following paragraphs:

"The number of pieces of mail collected during the fiscal year was 133,083,351. The value of stamps cancelled on mail collected by rural carriers amounted to \$2,601,815.28, and the pay of carriers for that period aggregated \$12,122,725.20.

"The average monthly cancellations for routes throughout the United States were \$10.64, and the average pay of carriers was \$49.54."

Summary.

Cost per month	\$1,010,227.10	12 months....	\$12,122,725.20
Receipts per month....	216,817.94	12 months....	2,601,815.28
Loss per month.....	793,409.16	12 months....	9,520,909.92

The above cost relates to carriers only—the pay of division superintendents, rural agents, *per diem* agents, clerks at division headquarters and various other employees, and the expense of maintaining the bureau organization, are not included. It may be safe, however, to estimate the cost of these items at about \$798,975 which would make up the total of \$12,921,700, the whole appropriation for that year, which makes the loss to the tax-producer \$10,319,884.92. In other words, a very large majority of the tax-producers are being compelled to pay about four dollars for every one earned by rural delivery, for an uncalled-for and unnecessary service in which it is impossible that they should have the slightest interest.

At this time there must be in operation about 35,000 routes and there are enough more in sight to carry the number, within five or six years, up to 60,000. This will mean a yearly payment to carriers of \$35,668,800, to which must be added the incidental office and other Department organization expenses, which may be safely put down at \$2,800,000 at least. This amount added to the carriers' pay will make a total of \$38,468,800, insuring an annual deficit of about \$28,851,000. But will the increase of routes stop at 60,000? There is no unknown quantity so voracious and ravenous as the well-fed appetite of the spoilsman politician of the recognized American type. He is omnivorous, and his well-practised digestion is ever ready for further supplies. This gigantic fraud will go on until the last acre of our territory is covered with settlements; or, possibly, until President Lincoln's "common people," no longer able or willing to submit to the extortions imposed by those who misrepresent them in Congress, and officially elsewhere, arise and inaugurate new methods for checking partisan extravagance.

From the view-point of use for the professional politician,

rural free delivery appears to be about as pernicious a raid upon the public treasury as could be invented. And yet, this new flesh-pot, with its enticing and appetizing fragrance floating out from the halls of Congress, in many directions to all the remote corners of our extended domain, proved to be the kind of a temptation the average citizen could not resist. So attractive had it become in its fifth year that many an honest citizen fell then who had never fallen before, and became an ardent advocate of this new state industry. And now he examines the probable ability of the Congressional candidate to secure rural routes in his district before casting his vote.

The new creation in the interest of partisan power is in one essential respect singularly exceptional. It was brought into existence without an actual or even an apparent excuse, made out of an opportunity and founded upon no pending necessity. The people upon whom this service was forced had never known that they needed it; and, in a majority of instances, they were astonished when informed that the Government was about to inaugurate it for doing that which they had always done for themselves. The village post-office had always been near at hand and their postal needs few—usually confined to the weekly paper and an average, in the strictly rural parts, of not over one hundred letters and circulars for each family per year. If a week went over without a family's sending to the post-office, others would bring the "mail" for those who remained at home.

From the first settlements these conditions had obtained in many parts of the country, were satisfactory and fully equal to all the necessities involved; and great was the astonishment of the sturdy citizen of the rural districts when he was informed that Government had kept him out of his rights, but, having seen the sin of its neglect, it was now making the right amends for the wrongs of the past; and he had only to sign the paper, the petition for service, and he would have the daily delivery at his door. This was a luxury he had never dreamed of, and in many instances he rebelled against its infliction. It was foreseen that its coming would do away with the excuse for going to the village for the mail, which in many instances, since the advent of the bicycle, had given the boys and girls an opportunity for an enjoyable ride when the day's work was over.

The aggrieved parties along the lines formerly so satisfactorily

served by the "old mail-stage" often resorted to the local press for the open expression of their sorrows. The following is a fair specimen of many that have been published, especially in the New England States:

"Three rural free-delivery mail routes were established from South Royalton, October 1st, two of them passing through the village of East Barnard from different directions. The post-office there and the stage running daily to South Royalton were discontinued three weeks ago, against the wishes of nearly every one in the place; and a petition has been sent to the Post-Office Department, signed by about 100 people, protesting against the change. The people of that community have ordered their mail sent to Sharon, where they take turns in going for it, South Royalton, where the mail arrives, and the usual office of supply, being ignored. At South Tunbridge, the postmaster resigned several weeks ago on account of the rural free delivery, and no one wants the office, but the Department has not yet seen fit to discontinue it."

The dissatisfaction is not confined to any particular class or classes, but is shared by all the people who go to make up the usual rural communities. They have missed the many little conveniences which attended the old system and which had become a part of their daily routine: the familiar old stage, with its accommodating driver who was always willing to purchase and deliver anything from a postage-stamp to a cart-wheel, they looked upon as a family necessity. The boys and girls had ridden with him to school for generations; and many a welcome visitor from afar had alighted from his familiar "old ark." In short, the mail-carrier had become a part of the every-day life of all those who lived along his line, and his daily passings were always looked for with pleasurable anticipations. No wonder the seven hundred and twenty dollar Government official, of the new order of regulated celerity, could not be regarded as an adequate substitute for the old-established order, which dated back to the days of the early settlers. The following protest from an aggrieved layman, printed in a New England newspaper, voices the sentiment of the dissatisfied:

"Rural free delivery is a grand thing for those that want it, and those that don't will have to learn to like it. But here is my view of the rural free delivery in any town where there is good mail service, and has been for years and years. In a good many places there is a little store and post-office together, which makes a fair living for the owner; but one alone is too little pay, so your rural free delivery throws up your post-office, and the store in small places dies out, and you go to

larger places to buy your provisions; and your little town with so many bright people in it grows poorer and poorer in more ways than one, your money going out of town and added expense necessary to the town to keep the roads in passable condition for the mail-carrier. He cannot shovel his way through snow-drifts and make his time, as he has got to. Then there are more things than these: you have thrown off your stage that has run for years before you were born, and if any of your friends or any one else wants to go through, instead of the small sum of seventy-five cents or one dollar, you can go and get them, or they can hire some one to bring them for \$2.50 or \$3.00. If you want to send anything away, instead of going to the stage road and sending it on the stage, you can go and carry it yourself or keep it at home. Some of you think that rural free delivery will make real estate higher, Not so, my friends; no man with a level head on him would buy a farm as quick with rural free delivery as he would with the good old-time stage running through the town twice a day. Now, if it is not asking too much of you, when any of you write another piece about rural free delivery, please sign your name, so we shall know who to blame and who not to."

There are two classes who derive complete satisfaction from the success of this new enterprise: the machine politicians, and the ever-thrifty citizens who abound in all rural communities, and who assist in promoting this scheme of a thriving State industry—for the money it yields to the community in which they are interested. The proceeds from this source are considered as "clear gain"—all coming into the State from the Government treasury and nothing going out.

It will be seen, by the following extract from the 1904 report of the Postmaster-General, that the six prominent Republican States, which are usually all powerful in National Conventions and in Congress, are having the generous reward of the pure and steadfast in the faith.

Number of routes in certain States in 1903 and 1904 and partly estimated cost of maintenance.

	1903.	1904.	Expense, 1904.
Illinois	1,352	2,123	\$1,528,560
Indiana	1,113	1,658	1,193,760
Iowa	1,484	1,863	1,341,360
Ohio	1,104	1,816	1,407,520
Pennsylvania	845	1,432	1,031,040
Wisconsin	632	1,076	774,720
Total.....	6,530	9,968	\$7,276,960

During the fiscal year ending June 30th 1904, there were established 9,447 new routes. Of these, the six favored States managed

to capture 34½ per cent., leaving 65½ per cent. for distribution among the other States and territories. The dimensions of this reward to these ever-reliable Republican States proves the exceptional activity of their machine managers, and also the kindly disposition, in the direction of liberal expenditures, of the officials in charge of postal affairs at Washington.

This singularly exceptional generosity stands for a significant future possibility of surpassing importance. Of late, there has been a marked tendency towards a centralization of power in the hands of the Executive, such as had never been witnessed before since the formation of our Government. In several instances individualism—personal preference—has asserted itself in the setting aside of customs as old as the Government, which were established in the interests of the sacred proprieties. These deviations from ancient customs have resulted in a certain amount of demoralization in the military and several of the civil departments of the public service.

These acts, no matter for what purpose intended, indicate a willingness to resort to an improper use of power to attain certain ends. This seemingly growing desire for concentration of power is becoming a menace of such magnitude that those who care for the perpetuation of our Government, in anything like the purity and form it was in when left to us by the fathers, would do well to adopt, if possible, effective measures to prevent further infractions. Suppose, for instance, when these conditions towards centralization have extended so as to indicate sufficient power of control in the hands of an Executive, that official should become possessed of a desire to exert his influence over a National Convention for the nomination of a candidate for his own party? The numerous cohorts of tax-eaters and managers of political machines—all being supported at the cost of the people—would be the willing tools he would work with. What obstacle could stand in the way to prevent a President from dictating the nomination of a favorite cabinet officer for his successor? In the histories of nations, where citizens have not, in time, resisted the usurpations of their rulers, stranger events have come to pass. And why not in time here?

Of all the political machines ever set in motion for the advantage of self-seeking partisans, the "Rural Free Delivery" shows promise of being the most far-reaching and potent in its malig-

nant results. At the present rate of increase, or even much less, we may safely, by 1915, count upon there being 100,000 routes in operation, whose carriers and other employees, if so disposed, would be able to control, besides their own, 500,000 other votes. This newly organized political spoilsman force, acting with others already in existence, would constitute a unit of power which would be irresistible.

As at present organized, this new branch of the public service is in condition for immediate and active service. Besides being a separate body, with a chief and a powerful, well-drilled staff at the seat of government, there is a numerous body of men who do its routine work and are in daily touch with the postmasters of the distributing offices throughout the country. In the field of trickster politics, these officials are masters. Probably not more than five per cent. of the whole, if even that, were appointed because of special fitness. The rule is that they are recommended by Senators and Representatives as being entitled to reward for political work performed for the party in power. These are the town and county experts who dictate the composition of the caucuses and control them, and assist the greater bosses to manipulate the larger and more important conventions. They know the local weaknesses and can be relied upon to marshall their forces where they will do the most good.

The Republican party, confident of its power, gorged with office, heedless of the rights of the minority, often disregarding honesty of purpose, promoting and encouraging vicious extravagance, in all departments of the public service, condoning and in many instances applauding unprecedented acts of its autocratic chief, legislating in the interest of classes and sections, and annually disregarding the principles involved in an enlightened and beneficent public policy, is now, by reason of its having created the evils enumerated, in a position for a still further advance against the interests of the people. Is there anything in its past history to encourage the belief that it will call a halt rather than press forward more recklessly than ever?

RUSH C. HAWKINS.